



STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO 2024 COMMUNITY SURVEY

REPORT OF RESULTS

JULY 2024



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Executive Summary

Survey Background and Methods

In an effort to determine the community's attitudes about City services and pending local policy, City leaders regularly conduct a community survey. The City of Steamboat Springs contracted with Polco/National Research Center (NRC) to implement the survey with a representative sample of the community to monitor resident sentiment about the quality of life and livability of the community, local service delivery, use of City amenities, and public expenditures, among other topic areas. The 2024 survey was this survey's eighth iteration.

For the 2024 survey, 2,000 households were randomly selected from a list of full-time registered voters within the city limits of Steamboat Springs. A postcard was mailed to the 2,000 randomly selected households notifying residents that they had been chosen to participate in the survey. The postcard included a web link for residents to complete the survey online, if desired. About one week later, households received a paper survey, along with a cover letter and a postage-paid return envelope, in the mail; about a week after that, to further boost the response rate, households received a second survey packet. All respondents had the option to either complete the survey online or to complete and return the paper survey; also, the survey was available in English and Spanish. There were a total of 579 survey respondents, comprised of 277 respondents who completed the survey online and 302 respondents who completed the paper version, yielding an overall response rate of 31%. The margin of error is plus or minus four percentage points around any given percentage.

The demographic characteristics of the 579 survey respondents were compared to the current registered voter profile for the city (based on the Routt County list of registered voters in Steamboat Springs). The results for full-time residents were weighted to reflect the demographic profile of all registered voters in the City of Steamboat Springs. Reported responses are for those who had an opinion – “don't know” responses were removed from the analyses.

Key Findings

Steamboat Springs remains a desirable place to live, but some ratings have decreased.

- Steamboat Springs residents appreciated their high quality of life and the city as a place to live, with around 8 in 10 awarding excellent or good scores. These ratings were lower than those given in prior years, but similar to other communities across the country with population sizes of less than 30,000 (population size benchmarks) and those with population sizes of less than 30,000 that identify as a resort community (resort community benchmarks).
- Around 9 in 10 respondents praised Steamboat Springs as a place to live, while 8 out of 10 positively rated the city as a place to raise children. Additionally, about 6 in 10 community members felt the city was an excellent or good place to retire and to work.
- Most of these ratings decreased from 2022 to 2024, but are on par with those seen in other communities across the country with population sizes of less than 30,000 and those with population sizes of less than 30,000 that identify as a resort community.
- Residents were asked about the likelihood of recommending living in Steamboat Springs to others and remaining in the city for the next five years, using a scale where 0 meant "not at all likely" and 10 meant "extremely likely". At least two-thirds of residents rated their likelihood of staying in Steamboat Springs as "7" or higher, while at least half rated their likelihood of recommending living in Steamboat Springs as "7" or higher.
- As in previous years, Steamboat Springs community members applauded their overall sense of safety and the natural environment, with nearly all respondents awarding excellent or good marks. About 9 in 10 residents praised the overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities, while 8 in 10 favorably rated the overall quality of wildlife habitat, the health and wellness opportunities and the image or reputation of the city.

Community affordability and housing continue to be a concern for residents.

- As in 2022, residents were critical of aspects related to the affordability of the community (availability of affordable quality mental health care, child

care/preschool, and housing, as well as cost of living), with 2 in 10 or fewer awarding favorable marks.

- Appraisals of the availability of affordable childcare, housing, parking, mental health care, and cost of living lagged behind benchmark comparisons for similarly sized communities and similarly sized resort communities.
- When asked about their level of support for a number of activities and programs aimed at increasing access to affordable and attainable housing in Steamboat Springs, a strong majority of respondents voiced support for each. About three-quarters of residents supported encouraging higher density/smaller units near where people work, requiring new multi-family building to contribute to affordable housing, and providing rental emergency assistance for renters during short-term crises. Meanwhile, about 7 in 10 supported requiring new commercial building to contribute to affordable housing and hiring City staff to plan for, invest in, and monitor housing needs.
- The 2024 survey also assessed residents' level of support for different alternatives on how to spend the Short-Term Rental (STR) tax. Among the 11 options listed in the survey, investing in housing for essential employees received the highest level of support (92% strongly or somewhat support) followed by partnerships with employers to construct affordable employee housing (85%), incentives for construction of Accessory Dwelling Units for LT rental (85%), Hwy 40 improvements in West Steamboat to support future affordable housing (83%), and incentives for converting Short Term Rentals to Long Term Rentals (82%).

Ratings for City government performance generally remain positive, though a few aspects have declined.

- In 2024, about 7 in 10 community members praised the overall quality of services provided by Steamboat Springs, which was a decrease from ratings given in 2022 and 2020. Seven in 10 residents also gave favorable marks to the overall customer service provided by City employees, which was also lower than the 2022 rating. Both ratings were similar to the benchmark comparisons.
- Scores for City-provided services tended to be highly reviewed by survey participants. Residents gave top marks to safety services (fire and

ambulance/EMS), City parks, and sewer services with about 9 in 10 or more providing excellent or good assessments to each.

- When compared to other communities of a similar size, ratings for Steamboat Springs' services tended to be similar to the averages with the exception of bus or transit services, snow removal, drinking water and city recreation programs, which were higher or much higher. On the other hand, land use, planning and zoning were lower than the benchmark.
- In 2024, about 6 in 10 Steamboat Springs residents stated they had confidence in City staff, and about half felt positively about the value of services for sales taxes paid for the services that are provided. About 4 in 10 of community members expressed satisfaction with the City welcoming resident involvement, treating all residents fairly and providing opportunities to participate in City decision-making.
- Compared to 2022, ratings for local government performance tended to decline. The job the city does matching expenditures to community priorities and the overall confidence in the Steamboat Springs City Council declined by 17%, while the rating for treating all residents fairly decreased by 14%. The openness/transparency of the City government declined by 12%, while the overall confidence in City staff, the job city government does at welcoming citizen involvement, and the value of services for sales taxes paid in Steamboat Springs each declined by 10%.

Steamboat Springs residents highly value the natural environment and the outdoor recreational opportunities available to them.

- As in previous survey years, Steamboat Springs community members applauded the overall natural environment, with nearly all respondents awarding excellent or good marks. Further, respondents indicated the environment was the most important aspect of the community, with 93% rating this area as essential or very important.
- About 9 in 10 respondents were pleased with the recreational opportunities and amenities in the city and with City parks, while more than 8 in 10 positively rated the availability of paths and walking trails.
- The City also asked residents to rate the importance of various activities, programs, and facilities in the community. About 9 in 10 survey respondents

rated the Howelsen ski and Nordic areas and the Emerald Mountain (summer and winter use) while at least 8 in 10 rated the Howelsen Hill Lodge, the Howelsen Hill jumps area and the Howelsen Rodeo/equestrian facility as essential or very important.

- Residents also indicated their participation in various activities, programs, and facilities. About 8 in 10 respondents reported having used Emerald Mountain in the summer and parked in the downtown area. About 7 in 10 had used Emerald Mountain in winter and 6 in 10 used Howelsen Hill ski & snowboard area and Howelsen Hill Lodge.
- The least used facilities were the Tennis and/or pickleball courts at Howelsen Hill, Volleyball Courts at Howelsen Hill, Howelsen Hill jumps area, BMX Bike park at Howelsen Hill and Skate park at Howelsen Hill, all with a reported below 25%.
- The 2024 survey asked residents about their opinions on recreation on the Yampa River. About one-third of Steamboat Springs residents felt there was too much recreation on the Yampa River, while the remaining two-thirds found it to be just right. Almost no respondents indicated that there was not enough recreation on the Yampa River.
- Thinking about the issues that affect the Yampa River, two-thirds of respondents mentioned low water levels. Trash in the river and overcrowding were the other concerns mentioned by more than half of respondents. Meanwhile, the increased water temperature and commercial tubing were mentioned by 38% and 33% of the respondents, respectively.
- City leadership also sought residents' opinions on a new visitor communications plan aimed at educating tourists on being responsible stewards in our community. Six options were presented to gauge support levels. Virtually all respondents strongly or somewhat supported initiatives to educate on protecting and enjoying wildlife and promoting responsible use of outdoor recreation amenities.